Prevalence of Behavior Modification Curricular Requirements in CAAHEP/COAES Accredited Exercise Science Programs

Erin L. Dopke, Lauren S. Kerner, John J. Guers, Drue T. Stapleton. Rider University, Lawrenceville, NJ

The benefits of physical activity and exercise are well established and far reaching. However, exercise compliance remains an issue and, to an extent, mitigates the benefits. Educational competencies regarding knowledge of behavior modification techniques are outlined by the Commission on the Accreditation of Allied Health Programs (CAAHEP) and the Council on the Accreditation of Exercise Science (COAES); how these competencies are met is less clear. Given the complexities of physical activity behavior, dedicated coursework addressing the fundamentals of behavior modification would be of value.

PURPOSE: To examine the prevalence of curricular requirements focused on behavior change in CAAHEP/COAES accredited exercise science programs.

METHODS: We conducted a search of the listed course curriculum for CAAHEP/COAES accredited exercise science programs offering a baccalaureate program (n=65), to determine if a class focusing on behavior modification was mandatory. We further broke the schools down by region of the American College of Sports Medicine and by Carnegie Classification. A Student’s T-Test was used to determine differences between two groups. Significant was set a p<0.05.

RESULTS: Of the 65 accredited institutions, 19 contained a specific course in behavior modification (p<0.05). Of these 19 schools, institutions within the Mid-Atlantic Region (MARC) were more likely to require a course on behavior change while five regions (Alaska, Central States, Northwest, Rocky Mountains, Texas) required no courses or had no accredited programs. Carnegie level Master’s Colleges & Universities (Master’s degree granting without high research activity) were more likely to require courses on behavior change (42%) when compared with smaller baccalaureate schools (21%) and larger schools offering doctoral degrees (37%).

CONCLUSION: Despite established educational competencies, many accredited exercise science programs do not include curricular requirements in behavior modification. While this may satisfy programmatic accreditors, in order to maximize the benefits of physical activity and exercise and elevate the preparation of the next generation of exercise professionals, dedicated coursework in behavior change should be incorporated into exercise science curricula.